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Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Friday, 23 March 2001, at 10 a.m.

Chairperson: Mr. DESPOUY (Argentina)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

STATEMENT BY THE DEPUTY MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF VIET NAM

1. Mr. NGUYEN Tam Chien (Viet Nam) said that, after years of arduous struggle and sacrifice, today the Vietnamese people had every right to be proud of its independence, one which Ho Chi Minh, the hero of the Vietnamese people, had said would be meaningless if it did not bring happiness and freedom to the people, i.e. ensure conditions for a decent existence. Those ideas were the basis of the Vietnamese perception of human rights. First and foremost was the notion of freedom, which at international level meant the right for each nation to choose its system of development and political institutions that suited it without any interference by other countries or societies.

2. Since the Declaration of Independence of 1945, Viet Nam had revised its Constitution several times and had enacted very complete legislation, which it had sought to translate into reality despite the difficulties caused by decades of war. At the international level, Viet Nam was party to eight core human rights instruments and it was convinced that civil and political rights must go hand in hand with economic, social and cultural rights.

3. Thanks to economic development in recent years, the Government continued to increase the percentage of the national budget allocated for social needs, especially to alleviate poverty in rural mountainous areas and for ethnic minorities. As a result of that policy, urban unemployment had declined from between 9 and 10 per cent during the period 1990-1992 to between 6 and 7 per cent during the period 1995-1999. The poverty rate had been reduced to 11 per cent in 2000. Literacy had been attained in all provinces and cities of the country and primary education had been made universal. More than 90 per cent of the population had access to health-care services. That policy, known in Viet Nam as Doi Moi, or renovation, had enabled every Vietnamese to benefit from the general improvement in living conditions.

4. However, much remained to be done for the Vietnamese Party and people to reduce poverty and modernize and industrialize the country. At the same time, the Vietnamese Government was pursuing its efforts so that all citizens could enjoy their rights, not only in Viet Nam's historical context, but also in line with the relevant international human rights criteria.

5. On the threshold of a new century and a new millennium, a constructive dialogue and cooperation on human rights questions must be started on the basis of equality and mutual respect.

STATEMENT BY THE UNDER-SECRETARY OF STATE FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF URUGUAY

6. Mr. VALLES (Uruguay) reaffirmed his country's unswerving faith in the democratic system, the only one capable of ensuring respect for human rights and dignity. As a country now at peace, Uruguay was working every day, in what was not always a favourable context, to guarantee that economic, social and cultural rights became a reality for all Uruguayans. The

Uruguayan Government and people alike were determined to see to it that society as a whole was based on tolerance and respect for diversity. It was in that spirit that the Uruguayan delegation had taken part in the preparatory work of the World Conference against Racism.

7. Eager to overcome the problems inherited from the past and work towards national reconciliation, the President of Uruguay, Mr. Jorge Battle, had refererred in his inaugural address of 1 March 2000 to the need to shed light on the fate of persons who had disappeared during the military dictatorship. The Peace Commission had been set up for that purpose. That was the latest phase in a reconciliation process that had begun in 1985 with the restoration of democracy and had then seen amnesty laws, the reinstatement of officials illegally removed from their posts and compensation for the family members of disappeared persons. That was an example of solidarity involving all the components of civil society, regardless of their religious or political persuasion. Uruguay was convinced that that same solidarity must also prevail at the international level, in particular with regard to vulnerable groups, namely, children, refugees, migrant workers, descendants of Africans, religious or ethnic minorities and all those living in poverty.

8. At the national level, Uruguay had given priority to programmes for the most underprivileged. Judging by the reports of ECLAC, Uruguay had received the best grade of all the Latin American countries for income distribution. Unfortunately, the protectionist policies of a number of industrial countries were slowing down Uruguay's development. There could be no real political and social stability and, consequently, respect for human rights as long as countries that produced basic commodities, such as Uruguay, did not have access to markets. Without economic progress, the material conditions needed to ensure respect for human rights could not exist. Thus, the time had come for the international community to be more alive to the interdependence of those factors.

9. As pointed out by President Battle at the Millennium Summit, it was not by attacking the effects that States would assume their responsibilities. The important thing was to attack the causes. In that context, the Uruguayan delegation urged the Commission to adopt a constructive rather than a penalizing approach to human rights. What mattered most on that sensitive issue was that the Commission should start a dialogue with States to get them to undertake to assume their responsibilities.

RACISM, RACIAL DISCRIMINATION, XENOPHOBIA AND ALL FORMS OF DISCRIMINATION (agenda item 6) (continued) (E/CN.4/2001/20, E/CN.4/2001/21 and Corr.1 and E/CN.4/2001/22; E/CN.4/2001/NGO/5, 11, 28, 38, 41, 57, 58, 61, 62, 73, 155, 162 and 164; E/CN.4/Sub.2/2000/11 and Corr.1; A/55/304)

10. Mr. FAYSAL (Syrian Arab Republic) pointed out that, far from being on the decline, racism was spreading every day. Racism was not only like a virus, but a "mutant" virus to which technological developments and uncontrolled globalization gave new forms. Today, it was ubiquitous; no continent was spared and Muslims were very often its victims. But unlike what certain fanatics asserted, Islam was a religion based on equality and tolerance.

11. In Palestine, it was revolting to see those who passed themselves off as victims of racism employ its most despicable forms: by preventing Palestinians from having access to health care, education or even water, the Jewish settlers were engaging in racist behaviour of a particularly despicable kind. The measures taken by States to eradicate racism were clearly insufficient.

12. The Syrian delegation was grateful to South Africa for hosting the World Conference against Racism. It paid tribute to Nelson Mandela, who personified the fight against that scourge. Countries at the Conference should strengthen the commitment they had entered into in signing the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination; they must face the facts head on and stop employing a double standard with countries that pursued blatantly racist policies. They must also seek the roots of that evil, consider everything that helped sustain it, look for ways of redressing the injustice suffered by its victims and punish those responsible. It was to be hoped that there would be unanimity on that question in the international community at Durban.

13. Mr. LUKIYANTSEV (Russian Federation) said that the World Conference against Racism would be the major event of the year 2001. Its success hinged on the eradication of a phenomenon that had disastrous consequences for the daily life of millions of individuals. Racial discrimination, aggressive nationalism and ethnic conflicts were the source of a multitude of human rights violations, as stressed, among others, by the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Ms. Robinson, and the High Commissioner for Refugees, Mr. Lubbers.

14. Those phenomena were all the more alarming because they took on new forms, such as ethnic and religious extremism, whose victims were primarily members of minorities or stateless persons, aggressive separatism and terrorism. Russia considered that the expression "racial discrimination" should be expanded to be taken in the broad sense because it was a multifaceted phenomenon.

15. The World Conference should give priority attention to the question of protecting vulnerable groups, such as national, ethnic and linguistic minorities, whose actual situation was the main indicator of respect for human rights. Thus, the World Conference's final documents must be of a practical nature and contain specific suggestions to serve as guidelines for Governments and international organizations. It was not enough merely to denounce racism: the importance of education and citizens' initiatives in combating it must also be stressed.

16. Mr. AKRAM (Pakistan) said he was of the view that the World Conference against Racism must adopt a declaration and plan of action that served as a guide for future generations. Racism afflicted the lives of millions the world over and jeopardized relations among nations and peoples. The international community must identify instances of endemic and institutional racism in countries that prided themselves on their democracy, tolerance and pluralism. It must condemn all political platforms based on doctrines of racial, national, cultural or religious superiority and denounce them as grave violations of human rights. It was unfortunate that entire societies continued to consider themselves superior and attempted to impose their own values in the name of progress or, even worse, in the name of "human rights".

17. Islamic societies the world over were confronted with such a form of racism. The time had come to combat Islamophobia. The World Conference would take place at a particularly auspicious moment, 2001 being the year of the Dialogue among Civilizations. On that occasion, it was important to make a commitment to stand in the way of those who defamed the religions cultures of others or sought to impose their own values. Accordingly, the Pakistani delegation called upon civil society, and NGOs in particular, to cooperate with the Organization of the Islamic Conference and other member States to promote a world of mutual tolerance and understanding.

18. Poverty was often at the root of racism in the world. The rich looked down on the poor. Witness the problems facing migrants, who, because they were destitute, were the victims of prejudices. Hence also the need to promote the right to development everywhere.

19. The World Conference should also address the issue of trafficking, for purposes of prostitution, in women and girls, who were very often from developing countries. Cooperation must be stepped up at all levels in order to combat such trafficking and address its underlying causes, which, once again, were poverty and lack of education.

20. Mr. SUTOYO (Indonesia) reaffirmed the great importance which his Government attached to the question of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and all forms of discrimination. Despite the victory over apartheid, there continued to be a plethora of discriminatory practices in the world, leading to endemic conflicts that sometimes took on alarming proportions. That situation persisted, notwithstanding the adoption of the United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination in 1963 and the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination in 1965, the holding of two World Conferences against Racism in 1978 and 1983 and the elaboration of programmes of action. The forthcoming Conference thus provided a timely opportunity for the international community to renew its commitments and lay the foundation for a more just future based on recognition of diversity. In that connection, the Indonesian Government considered it essential to focus on prevention, which could be done only through education. High priority must be given to education, to which more resources must be allocated at all levels. The new information technologies could also be harnessed to promote the message of the oneness of mankind.

21. As a multicultural, multi-ethnic and multilingual society, Indonesia was currently beset by an economic crisis which, combined with the political transformation process, had had serious consequences. Riots had broken out in 1998 and, more recently, some parts of the country had been the scene of violent ethnic clashes. Indonesia must draw lessons from those tragedies and work to restore harmony and tolerance among the various ethnic and religious groups.

22. The Indonesian Government was determined to address the root causes of those conflicts and remove all discriminatory clauses from its legislation. That initiative was well under way. In 1998, the code on identity cards, which had contained discriminatory provisions regarding Indonesian Chinese, had been repealed and, more recently, Presidential Instruction No. 14/1967 prohibiting that community's customs and traditions had been revoked.

23. The Indonesian Government attached great importance to the preparations for the World Conference against Racism. A number of regional preparatory meetings and seminars had been held to devise strategies for combating all forms of racism and intolerance. During those meetings, differences of emphasis had emerged on the question of racism, depending on the region. Thus, the World Conference must lead to the adoption of a pragmatic declaration and programme of action which took due account of the main concerns of each region. Lastly, dialogue and consultation were of particular importance in overcoming the differences of opinion raised by a number of sensitive and contentious issues in the Conference's agenda. The next special debate in the Commission on Human Rights on the topic of tolerance and respect should promote that dialogue.

24. Mr. SOLARI (Argentina) said that he endorsed the statement made on behalf of the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States by the representative of Mexico concerning the determination of the countries of the region to guarantee the success of the next World Conference against Racism. He welcomed the reports of the Secretary-General (E/CN.4/2001/20) and of the Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance (E/CN.4/2001/21).

25. The Regional Preparatory Conference, held in December 2000 in Santiago, Chile, had been an opportunity to reaffirm the underlying principles of the countries of the region in combating discrimination. The preparations for the World Conference against Racism and the proclamation of 2001 as International Year of Mobilization against Racism and Racial Discrimination placed those issues at the core of the Commission's work. Despite the progress made in establishing a universal legal framework for the prevention and elimination of racism and racial discrimination, it must be said that the international community had not succeeded in eradicating racial hatred or the most violent and terrible forms of intolerance. Discrimination, xenophobia and the spreading of ideologies based on racial hatred took various forms, from insidious practices to extreme violence, such as ethnic cleansing. In any case, they could not be regarded as isolated occurrences indicative of social ills, but as a violation of the fundamental rights on which democracy was based.

26. Argentina was no exception. It still experienced manifestations of racism and discrimination, notably anti-Semitism, although they remained isolated and sporadic. Determined to prevent and combat such phenomena, it had established institutions, such as the National Institute against Discrimination, Xenophobia and Racism (INADI) and the offices of ombudsmen, which were responsible for closely monitoring manifestations of racism and promoting tolerance at the national and provincial levels. Legislative and administrative measures had also been taken with a view to imposing heavy penalties on perpetrators of racist crimes, punishing persons who spread ideologies based on racial or ethnic superiority and making provision for compensation.

27. Argentina had recently introduced its fifteenth report in the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination and described in detail the measures taken to combat discriminatory practices, especially those targeting indigenous populations and immigrants from neighbouring countries. In that connection, a centre had been opened to receive complaints and take in, assist and counsel persons or groups that had been the victims of discrimination.

28. The fight against racism, racial discrimination and xenophobia gave countries the chance to carry out joint action and draw on the experience of others. The World Conference would be an opportunity to meet the great challenge of the dawning millennium and build the foundation of a more just world based on tolerance and the acceptance of others and their differences.

29. Mr. CHUNG Eui-Yong (Republic of Korea) said that, despite its untiring efforts, the international community had been unable to eradicate racism. As underscored by the Special Rapporteur in his report on the question (E/CN.4/2001/21), racism was an everyday phenomenon and had increasingly taken the form of xenophobia through the rejection of others and the defence of communalism, ethnocentrism and inter-ethnic conflict, as well as a disturbing resurgence of extreme right-wing movements.

30. Racism was rooted in intolerance, hatred and prejudice, which had sown the seeds of many tragedies, including genocide. There could be no peace without tolerance, and that was why the Republic of Korea attached particular importance to promoting a culture of tolerance. The World Conference against Racism had a daunting task. The differences of opinion on priorities that had emerged at the preparatory conferences might be overcome if participants adopted a forward-looking perspective. In that context, the special debate on tolerance and respect would provide the Conference with valuable input.

31. The Republic of Korea had acceded to the six major international human rights instruments, including the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. It was one of 33 countries to have made the declaration under article 14 of the Convention recognizing the competence of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination to receive and consider communications from individuals or groups of individuals claiming to be victims of a violation of any of the rights set forth in the Convention.

32. Migrants were very often the targets of discrimination and racism in a number of regions. Illegal migrants were the most vulnerable because they were harassed and must work in intolerable conditions. Since coming to power in 1998, President Kim Dae-jung had made the defence of human rights one of his priority domestic and foreign policies. The rights enjoyed by legal foreign workers had been extended to undocumented workers to provide them with a social safety net and the children of undocumented foreign workers had been allowed to attend primary school.

33. Protecting human rights was first and foremost the responsibility of the State. Legislation, policies and human rights institutions were crucial to protecting society from racial discrimination. In that context, the delegation of the Republic of Korea was pleased to announce that a national human rights commission was about to be set up which would help strengthen the human rights protection machinery and promote education on human rights, including action to combat racism and racial discrimination.

34. Ms. SAUERBREY (United States of America) said that her Government was firmly opposed to racism in all its forms and manifestations because it was convinced that a democratic Government must serve all citizens, irrespective of their race, religion, gender or national origin. The United States had not always measured up to the high ideals which it had set for itself and its history had been marked by painful periods, especially for persons of African-American and

Native American descent. But it had made enormous progress and adopted a whole set of laws to promote tolerance, equal opportunity and racial justice and it had become the most ethnically, racially and religiously diverse nation on earth. Far from opposing such diversity, it had welcomed it, opening its borders to people from around the world who sought freedom and opportunity in the United States. President Bush had recently directed Attorney-General John Ashcroft to conduct a review of the extent of "racial profiling" by federal law enforcement authorities.

35. No country could claim to have eliminated discrimination and prejudice. Although racial and ethnic minorities had made tremendous strides in all areas in the United States, efforts must continue to create an environment that offered equality of opportunity in education. To that end, President Bush had decided that his Administration would do its utmost to ensure that no child was left behind. In an age of global markets, education was the key to individual empowerment and the Bush Administration and, in particular, Roderick Paige, the first African-American Secretary of Education, was determined to see to it that every child had the tools he or she needed to succeed.

36. The United States was deeply committed to the success of the World Conference against Racism. Eliminating racism would not be easy; to do so, all countries must work together, learn from each other's experience and focus on each country's policies and practices. Rather than judging and condemning, it was important to acknowledge the errors of the past - slavery and colonialism - so as to take on the challenges of today without further delay. One of those challenges was to put an end to all persisting forms of slavery and human bondage. The Conference must serve as an opportunity for articulating a new vision of the world in which racism, prejudices and intolerance no longer had a place. Governments had an essential role to play in combating those scourges, as did intergovernmental organizations, the private sector and non-governmental organizations. The participants in the Conference must give the necessary attention to the many programmes that had enabled non-governmental organizations to achieve excellent results in the fight against racism.

37. It was high time to put an end to racism, intolerance and xenophobia, for the future depended on it. It was important to work together to achieve change and make the Conference a milestone of progress.

38. Mr. SAHRAOUI (Algeria) said that, like a virus, racism had mutated to adapt to today's world and take over all the spaces that might be the source of the rejection of others and discrimination. As pointed out by the Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, those new manifestations were found in particular in developed countries. In some of those countries, leaders no longer hesitated to refer to "national preference" in their political speeches, to use expressions such as "non-national", "new immigrant" or "illegal foreigner" in their regulations and to implement exclusionary policies and racist immigration measures. Political parties and extremist and xenophobic organizations were proliferating in those countries. Moreover, some media held foreigners responsible for all the country's ills and conveyed ideas that encouraged racism and xenophobia. In schools, textbooks taught children to accept racial stereotypes, which had the effect of entrenching discrimination in society as a "politically correct" phenomenon. Segregationist practices were current not only in connection with access to employment and

housing, but also in relations with the administration and in the jurisprudence of the courts, which were often lenient towards perpetrators of racist acts. The situation was particularly serious because it was prejudicial to the fundamental values of solidarity, fraternity, co-existence, equality and justice for all members of society.

39. Algeria called on countries that had such a situation to combat and eradicate racism and discrimination by refusing electoral vote-catching and political opportunism and returning to the principles set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It also urged them to reform their school system, make racist acts punishable by law or, where that was the case, implement legislation effectively for all segregationist practices and not legalize, but disband racist, extremist and xenophobic political parties and organizations. Those and others measures, such as recognizing the competence of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination to receive and consider communications from persons or groups claiming discrimination, would contribute to the harmonious development of those countries.

40. Algeria endorsed the comments by the High Commissioner for Human Rights at the forum on racism and racial discrimination recently held in Stockholm that globalization and the use of the Internet were conducive to the spread of racism and intolerance in the world. The merging of markets and economies unquestionably broadened the gap between nations and peoples, exacerbated institutionalized racism and created new forms of exclusion and marginalization. While States encouraged the movement of capital and goods, they discouraged, restricted and even penalized movement of persons and emigration movements, usually from South to North.

41. The World Conference against Racism, which would be held in September 2001, was an excellent opportunity for all peoples and countries to take stock, address problems candidly and adopt resolutely pragmatic and concrete prevention, education and protection measures to help put an end to racism.

42. Mr. NGOUBEYOU (Cameroon) said that the agenda item under consideration was of great importance because it was very disconcerting to see that racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance were everyday occurrences. Race, nationality, ethnicity and religious beliefs, which had become either the primary causes of human rights violations or pretexts for perpetrating such violations, had sometimes led to such crimes as genocide and the exclusion of part of society from involvement in economic and social life. It would be utopian to think that any country could claim to be racially or ethnically homogeneous. Hence the need to ban or prohibit the notion of race or ethnic group as the sole basis for determining nationality or at least take measures to prevent such a concept from spreading. Cameroon was proud of its diversity, which made it unique and strong.

43. The World Conference against Racism must take account of the special sensitivities of each continent which had become apparent during the preparatory process. The Conference must project itself into the future, define concrete guidelines and put the issues under discussion in their true historical context, relying on the facts of everyday life to find lasting solutions.

44. The racist and discriminatory practices of which migrants, refugees, asylum-seekers and unemployed foreigners were the victims must be discouraged. A study should be undertaken with a view to preventing racist propaganda, notably via the new communications media. It was also necessary to encourage respect for the right to development because poverty and great economic inequality could give rise to racist incidents. The Cameroon Government firmly supported the declarations and decisions adopted by the African Regional Preparatory Conference in Dakar in January 2001. It hoped that the World Conference would result in the creation of effective machinery for following through on its recommendations and decisions and an international body to monitor racist behaviour, as well as the establishment of an international fund to compensate the victims of slavery, racial discrimination and related intolerance.

45. In closing, he hoped that the Conference would pave the way for a future without discrimination based on race, language, colour or religion.

46. Ms. PILIP (Romania) said that her country endorsed the declaration made by the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Sweden on behalf of the European Union. Romania had made the promotion of human rights in general and action to combat all forms of discrimination in particular essential aspects of its policy. She supported the efforts by the international community to combat the many manifestations of racial discrimination, intolerance and xenophobia that persisted around the world.

47. It was not sufficient to punish those who committed racist acts. The attention of law enforcement officials and the population as a whole must also be drawn to the need to uphold and defend the values of human dignity and tolerance. Non-governmental organizations and the media had an important role to play in that regard. It was important to stress in that connection that the freedom of expression of some must not be exercised at the expense of the dignity of others.

48. It was in that spirit that Romania had organized various seminars and symposia in 2000 on action to combat racism and conducted information campaigns for young people and law enforcement personnel, particularly through the intermediary of the Romanian Institute for Human Rights.

49. Concerning the rise of the extreme right in Romania, to which the Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism had referred, it should be pointed out once again that there was a close correlation between civil and political rights, on the one hand, and economic, social and cultural rights, on the other. In Romania, but also in many other democracies, the population had manifested its discontent about the deterioration of the economic and social situation by voting for populist and even extremist parties, which claimed to have instant solutions to very complex problems. Although, according to recent opinion polls, the popularity of those extremists was declining, it had to be said that today the Great Romania Party was an important force in the Romanian Parliament.

50. Romania hoped that the World Conference against Racism would promote a general awareness of the seriousness of racism and the need to take action on both its effects and causes. The World Conference should also work to bring about the smoother functioning of international

organizations responsible for combating racism and the strengthening of their cooperation with States. For its part, Romania was prepared to contribute to the success of the Conference, as shown by the Symposium on Racism currently being held in Bucharest.

51. Ms. LAOHAPHAN (Thailand) said that, although racism was not new, advances in technology and globalization were facilitating the spread of racist hatred in all walks of life. Women and children were its main victims. It was important to attack its root causes, whether economic, social or political, through prevention, education and socialization. From an early age, children must be made aware of the richness of cultural differences.

52. Racism and racial discrimination were not isolated phenomena. They were linked to a whole set of other factors, such as poverty, illiteracy, hunger, unemployment and poor health. Thus, the fight against racism must go hand in hand with the implementation of fundamental political, economic, social and cultural rights.

53. In combating exclusion and discrimination, the State could play a catalytic role and must be supported by many other social forces. Civil society, non-governmental organizations, the advertising industry, the media and the private sector must also fight prejudice and stereotypes and help create a culture of tolerance and respect for diversity.

54. An international political and economic order must be fostered that encouraged participation in decision-making by all. The United Nations and its specialized agencies must include the issue of racism and racial discrimination in all its activities. Emphasis must be placed on the prevention of racial discrimination in all areas, including at the economic, social, political and legal levels, in particular with regard to women.

55. For Thailand, it was very important that the World Conference against Racism was being held in Durban in South Africa. Thailand thanked the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Ms. Robinson, for the efforts and energy she had put into the preparations for the Conference. Her visit to Thailand in March 2001 had helped heighten public awareness of the theme of the World Conference and the promotion of human rights. On that occasion, the Prime Minister of Thailand had signed the Declaration on Tolerance and Diversity, which had been translated into Thai and widely distributed to the public.

56. The goodwill ambassadors, including a Thai national who was the former Miss Universe, Ms. Pornthip Nakhirankanok, could make a significant contribution to raising awareness of the objectives of the Durban Conference.

57. Thailand would like to see the results of the work of the expert seminars and the regional preparatory conferences incorporated into the draft declaration and programme of action of the World Conference. The Newsletter of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on the Durban Conference should also be more widely disseminated.

58. Thailand would participate actively in the preparatory process leading up to the Durban Conference. It had established a national committee, chaired by the Minister for Foreign Affairs, with a mandate to consider whether Thailand should become a party to the International

Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination prior to the Conference and to raise public awareness of the question of racism, in particular by keeping the public informed about United Nations activities in the run-up to the Conference.

59. Thailand would take part in a spirit of cooperation and mutual understanding in the second meeting of the Preparatory Committee, to be held in May 2001. Although it was important not to forget the past in order to avoid repeating the same mistakes, it was also essential to be forward-looking and to make the World Conference a major stepping stone towards a world that respected cultural uniqueness and diversity and was free of all racial prejudice.

60. Ms. ACOSTA (Mexico) said that more than half a century after the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which proclaimed that human beings were born free and equal in dignity and rights, no country was spared violations of human rights and racial discrimination, the latter manifesting itself in particular through exclusion and the resurgence of a superiority complex in certain groups. In recent years, racial and ethnic tensions had been the source of many armed conflicts which the international community had not been able to prevent and in the course of which war crimes and crimes of genocide had been committed.

61. It was urgently necessary to combat discriminatory policies and laws, for which there could be no justification, not even national sovereignty. Some developed countries must amend without delay immigration and population laws which, far from combating such phenomena, sometimes tolerated the racial discrimination and xenophobia of which migrant workers, in particular those without papers, were the victims. Xenophobia and intolerance could not be condoned in the name of freedom of expression, especially when they were manifested via new means of mass communication, such as the Internet.

62. Non-governmental organizations had a vital role to play both in preparing the World Conference against Racism and in following through, at the national and international levels, on the implementation of the plan of action which the Conference would adopt. Special attention must be given to the discrimination and xenophobia of which certain groups were the victims, especially immigrants and migrant workers and their families.

63. In that connection, the World Conference against Racism appealed to States to ratify without delay the 1990 International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families. Four ratifications were still needed before the instrument could enter into force.

64. President Fox Quesada had announced that holders of human rights mandates could come to Mexico whenever they wished, that Mexico would accede to those human rights instruments to which it was not yet a party and that the Government planned to make the declaration under article 14 of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination.

65. In that connection, the Government recognized that indigenous persons in Mexico were clearly one of the groups which, having suffered most from discrimination, were also the poorest and most excluded. Eager to establish new and constructive relations with Mexico's indigenous

peoples, President Fox's Government would therefore continue to stress how important it was for the Union Congress to consider shortly a bill which, pursuant to the San Andres Agreements concluded in 1996 between the Mexican Government and the Zapatista National Liberation Army, recognized and fully protected the rights of Mexico's indigenous peoples.

66. President Fox's Government was determined to conduct a crusade against racial discrimination at the national and international levels. In that spirit, it was actively involved in the preparations for the World Conference against Racism.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.